

TELLS SEN. DEMINT “QUIT PLAYING POLITICS WITH THE SAFETY OF THE FLYING PUBLIC”

WASHINGTON, DC--U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) today urged Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC) to drop his hold on the nomination of Mr. Erroll Southers as the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Administrator. DeMint has been holding up the nomination for months and as a result, the TSA has been without a confirmed leader for an entire year. It is clear from the incident on Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas day that there are problems in our current security system that must be addressed quickly. The TSA desperately needs leadership in order to address these problems.

The letter is below:

December 29, 2009

The Honorable Jim DeMint

United States Senator

SR-340

Washington, DC 20510-4004

Dear Senator DeMint:

I was one of the principle authors of the legislation creating the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). And, as a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee and the Aviation Subcommittee, I have worked hard to address evolving security threats. It is in this capacity that I am writing to urge you to drop your hold on the nomination of Mr. Erroll Southers for the position of TSA Administrator.

We were extremely fortunate that disaster was averted on Northwest Flight 253 on Christmas Day. I applaud President Obama for ordering a review of terrorist watch list and screening policies. However, it's clear we must move quickly to address problems in the system and we need leadership at TSA to do that.

Former TSA Administrator Kip Hawley was a forceful, effective leader who did a lot to improve aviation security. Administrator Hawley advocated moving to the type of full body screening technology that could have identified the explosives that Mr. Abdulmutallab was allegedly hiding. However, in the year that Mr. Hawley has been gone, we have lost much of that momentum. We need a strong leader at the TSA to move policies and technology along, and ensure that we have the resources and policies in place to ensure the protection of the traveling public.

You must decide what presents the greater threat to the traveling public, terrorists organizing attacks against U.S. aviation or the potential of labor organizing amongst TSA employees. Many federal employees involved in securing our nation, such as Customs and Border Protection Officers, Border Patrol Officers, and civilian employees at the Department of Defense have civil service protections and collective bargaining. These workers are still effectively able to respond to new threats and challenges. The suggestion that an organized workforce would inhibit TSA from providing effective security is a red herring.

I sincerely hope you will reconsider your position and lift the hold on Mr. Southers. This will give the TSA the leadership it needs to meet evolving threats.

Sincerely,

PETER A. DEFAZIO

Member of Congress